



# *apuntes*

Reflexiones teológicas desde el contexto Hispano-Latino

**Dare We Be Human?**

**César Chávez and the Challenge of Christian Humanism**

*Edgardo Colón-Emeric, Ph. D.*

**Qué lindo es mi Cristo:<sup>1</sup>**

**El Jesús/Cristo Erótico en la Música Cristiana  
Protestante Caribeña, Latinoamericana y Latina<sup>2</sup>**

*Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, Ph.D.*

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# *Apuntes*

## *Theological Reflections from a Hispanic-Latino Context*

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## From the Editor

César Chavez and “coritos” are very popular elements in our Christian Latino/culture; and in this issue of *Apuntes* our readers will find two superb articles describing the importance and influence of these two elements in our Hispanic theology and culture. First, Dr. Edgardo Colón-Emeric, who teaches at Duke Divinity School as an Assistant Professor of Theology and is the founding director of the Hispanic House of Studies, presents a challenge to all of us as he considers the work and ministry of César Chavez and invites us to follow in the footsteps of the great community organizer and activist, as we strive to live a committed Christian life. Dr. Colón-Emeric, who was born in Puerto Rico, obtained a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Cornell University (1990), an M.S. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Vermont (1994), a M.Div. from Duke Divinity School (1997), and a Ph.D. from Duke University (2007); and he is an ordained minister in the North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, where he has served as pastor for Hispanic ministries.

The second article comes to us by another Puerto Rican, Dr. Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, who serves as Professor of Global Christianities and Mission Studies at Perkins School of Theology-Southern Methodist University. In his article, Dr. Cardoza-Orlandi uses popular hymns and “coritos” to offer a Christology that comes from a Pentecostal and Protestant perspective. Dr. Cardoza-Orlandi is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and has received the following degrees: From Princeton Theological Seminary, Ph.D. in Mission, Ecumenics and History of Religions with concentration in Latin America & the Caribbean (1999) and Master of Theology in Mission, Ecumenics and History of Religions (1990); an M.Div. from Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico (1987) and a B.A. in General Studies from University of Puerto Rico (1984).

I am grateful for contributions and insights that these two excellent articles provide and I hope that the readers of *Apuntes* will be moved and encouraged to see Christ in both, César Chavez and in the popular songs many of us sing. May God help us to see with God’s eyes and to hear with God’s ears as we listen to the singing voices of our people and as we listen to the voice of our brother César Chavez as presented by Dr. Colón-Emeric and Dr. Cardoza-Orlandi.

## Dare We Be Human? César Chávez and the Challenge of Christian Humanism

*Edgardo Colón-Emeric, Ph. D.*

### I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In 1968, after abstaining from all food for twenty five days, an emaciated César Chávez broke his fast by partaking of the Eucharist at a mass attended by thousands of supporters, reporters, and celebrities. Too weak to speak for himself, Chávez asked that a statement of thanks which he had composed earlier be read on his behalf. The statement began by voicing the difficulty of the struggle for the rights of farm workers and concluded with what are perhaps Chávez's most famous words:

When we are really honest with ourselves,...we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life.

I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men!<sup>2</sup>

The human being is not first and foremost a citizen, or a worker, but a person, in particular, a person open in generosity to the other. Chávez's affirmation of the dignity of the human and the need to defend this dignity through nonviolent struggle is timely.

At the core of the contemporary immigration debate lies the question of who counts as human and who does the counting. As is well known, there are many faces to the immigration crisis. Immigration is chameleon like, changing its colors according to the mood of the country. At times, immigration is a national security issue, the immigrant, a potential drug trafficker or terrorist. At other times, immigration is a national identity issue, the immigrant is the herald of Mexifornia, the harbinger of the fall of Western civilization. Immigration is a legal issue (what

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a presentation for the "Cesar Chávez Lecture Series" at Hope College on March 29, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 5059).



part of illegal don't you understand), an economic issue (they collect benefits and don't pay taxes), a humanitarian issue (hundreds die crossing the border each year). Immigration has been framed in these and other ways, but the concept which gives the many faces of immigration its power is the concept of sovereignty and behind the concept of sovereignty is the concept of the sovereign individual.<sup>3</sup>

César Chávez's vision of the dignity and difficulty of being human interrupts the anthropologies underwriting contemporary immigration policies with a question: dare we be human? In this paper, I suggest that one of the most helpful ways to frame and extend Chávez's life and work is by considering Chávez as an exemplar of Christian humanism. I begin by briefly sketching, with the help of Jacques Maritain, what I understand by Christian humanism. I follow this sketch with an overview of Chávez's life, after which I explore the roots of Chávez's humanism and the means by which he nurtured and promoted this humanism. Finally, I draw some implications from Chávez's understanding of the human for the current attempts at immigration reform, implications whose efficacy depends on courage and hope.

## II. Christian Humanism

What is Christian humanism? First, what is humanism? Humanism names an intellectual, literary, and social movement toward the human. A variety of movements have been promoted under the label of humanism. Classical humanism, the humanism of the renaissance, whose chief characteristic was a return to the literary sources of Western culture. Secular humanism, the humanism of the rationalists which elevated the human by eliminating God. Christian humanism, a movement that affirms the dignity of the human being as the image of God against all contemporary iconoclasts who would reduce the human to either a beast or a machine.

<sup>3</sup> Immigration scholar, Aristide Zolberg, avers that "The restrictive immigration régime prevails worldwide because it constitutes a sine qua for maintaining the "Westphalian" international system, as well as the privileged position of the "core" states amidst highly unequal conditions." Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 14. The 1648 treaty of Westphalia ended the religious wars which had plagued Europe for a century by establishing the absolute supremacy of each nation over their territories and their absolute freedom from interference from other countries. The hallmark of this new system of political governance was each country's sovereign control over their borders. In the words of Jeremy Rabkin, *Law without Nations? Why Constitutional Government Requires Sovereign States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 69.

Without a doubt the chief apologist for Christian humanism in the twentieth century was the Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain. Much could be said about Maritain and his work,<sup>4</sup> but I will limit myself to one aspect of his thought that is key for the current argument, the distinction between person and individual. For Maritain, the human being needs to be understood as both an individual and a person.<sup>5</sup> Individuality has its roots in material principles. I am an individual because this is my body, my flesh, my bones, my brain. Personality has its roots in spiritual principles. I am a person because I am made in the image of God, capable of knowing and loving. These two dimensions of the human being are of tremendous significance for Maritain's understanding of the relation of the human to society. As an individual, I am social by nature because the material principles of my individuality need the help of others to be sustained. I need help to procure my daily bread. As a person, I am social by nature because the plenitude of perfections that constitute human personality desires to be communicated to others. As an individual, I am a part of society; the individual good serves the common good. As a person, I transcend society; the personal good surpasses the common good because the personal good is God.

Human action and human society can be oriented toward individuality or toward personality. Of itself, individuality is good. The problem occurs when individuality becomes the chief marker and orientation of humanity. When this happens two tragic consequences can follow. We either end up with an individualist society where the value of human life is reduced to materialist metrics (health, money, fame, etc.) or we end up with a communist society where the human life has value only insofar as it contributes to a common good which is measured strictly in material units. By contrast, Christian humanism promotes a personalist society, a society where the whole human, body and soul, is turned toward the neighbor in generosity and toward God in gratitude. For Maritain, a society that is founded on the holistic anthropology of Christian humanism is a society that is hospitable to and encouraging of self-sacrifice, heroism, and even holiness.

Is the anthropology of Maritain's Christian humanism a suitable entry point into a reflection on Chávez's legacy? Admittedly, the connections between Maritain and Chávez are not direct. Chávez did not, to my knowledge, read Maritain, nor did he

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<sup>4</sup> For a good biography on Maritain see Jean-Luc Barré, *Jacques and Raïssa Maritain: Beggars for Heaven* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).



know him personally. Yet they were related indirectly in various ways. First, Saul Alinsky, the founder of the Industrial Areas Foundation and a close friend of Maritain, was also one of Chávez's allies. In fact, Maritain was the one who pressed Alinsky to write his groundbreaking book *Reveille for Radicals*.<sup>6</sup> Second, as we shall see, Chávez drank deeply from the same wells of Catholic spirituality and social teaching that Maritain did. In their own ways, both contributed to the connection of spirituality and social engagement, one by writing books, the other by organizing strikes. Third, bringing these two into conversation is a way of underscoring the fundamental complementarity of Christian theology and social action, a complementarity that is all too often neglected today. Chávez's work among migrant farm workers, *La Causa*, was part union, part grassroots community organization, part civil rights movement, part religious revival. I believe that the best way to understand and extend *la causa* to new social challenges, such as immigration reform, is precisely as an integral and solidary struggle for the fullness of human flourishing, for Christian humanism.<sup>7</sup>

### III. A Brief Sketch of Chavez's Life

César Estrada Chávez was born on March 31, 1927. The first years of his life were spent in the vicinity of Yuma, Arizona, where his family owned a small farm. In 1938, after losing the family farm to a wealthy landowner, the Chávez family moved to California and became migrant farm workers. César learned of the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *The Philosopher and the Provocateur: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky*, ed. Bernard Doering (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994). Incidentally, Maritain's praise for Alinsky's work is high indeed, "epoch making," he calls it. "It reveals a new way for *real* democracy, the only way in which man's thirst for social communion can develop and be satisfied, through freedom and not through totalitarianism in our disintegrated times. You seem at first glance over optimistic, in reality your method starting with self-interest and egotistic concerns in order to transform them shows how sound is your knowledge of human nature. Your optimism is Christ's optimism. You are a Thomist, dear Saul, a practical Thomist!" (11) The exchange of letters between Alinsky and Maritain is deserving of further exploration that might lead to re-evaluation of their respective work and legacy. Maritain, an Alinsky radical? Community organizing as applied Thomism?

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, ¶ 7 *The Plan of Delano*, which underscored the significance of penance for the hope of social reform, can be read as the manifesto for integral and solidary humanism presented in conciliar documents like *Guadium et Spes* and organized in the *Compendium*.

struggles faced by migrant farm workers not from books but from the inside. He learned firsthand the brutality of working the fields with a short hoe, the treachery of labor contractors, and the indifference of the farm owners.

In 1952, Chávez joined the Community Service Organization, a group that had strong ties with Saul Alinsky, a giant in the world of community organizing. In the context of this work, Chávez met Dolores Huerta. When the structure of CSO proved too limited to serve the needs of farm workers, Chávez left the CSO and together with Dolores Huerta founded the National Farm Worker Association. I should say that he did so with Alinsky's blessing. "If the CSO will have to die so that a union for farm workers can be built," Alinsky said, "it will be a very healthy death. Sometimes an organization has to die."<sup>8</sup> In any event, Chávez's union became engaged in the struggle with farm owners on behalf of farm worker's rights. Perhaps the most famous of these struggles was the protracted strike against grape growers in the Delano area. By the time of his death on April 23, 1993, César Chávez had attained national recognition.

Chávez's legacy is complex. For some he is the Latino, Martin Luther King, Jr. For others, a peaceful Che Guevara. For others, a Christian Gandhi. These are all fruitful ways to engage Chávez, but I want to suggest another category—saint. Chávez is a model of a type of holiness very much in need today, what Maritain calls a "secular sanctity." Chávez is a witness to the narrow way between two twin perils. "There are for the Christian community," Maritain warns, "two opposite dangers, the danger of seeking sanctity only in the desert, and the danger of forgetting the necessity of the desert for sanctity."<sup>9</sup> The struggle to affirm the dignity of the human, the worth of the person who happens to be a farm worker, or an undocumented immigrant cannot be sustained on bread and material means alone. The one who hungers and thirst for justice needs to spend time in the desert and fast. César Chávez's life and work manifest an integral humanism that is worthy of study and emulation.

#### **IV. The Roots of Chávez's Christian Humanism**

The theological roots of Chavez's wisdom and work are not widely appreciated or recognized. Ronald Wells correctly states that whereas scholarship affirms the religious foundations of the African American freedom struggle, "[t]here is not yet

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 2711).

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World, the Collected Works of Jacques Maritain*, vol. XI (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 76.



scholarly agreement on whether Latino civic engagement was also, or as much, religiously based, although recent scholarship is beginning to tend in that direction."<sup>10</sup> Prominent among this recent scholarship is Frederick Dalton's book *The Moral Vision of César Chávez*.<sup>11</sup>

Dalton argues that the moral vision of Chávez, that is to say, his understanding of the dignity of the human was homespun from the faith of the *abuelitas*. The earthy wisdom of women like Chavez' mother and grandmother as well as their acts of devotion nourished in Chávez an intuitive feel for the beauty of serving others.

Consider for example César's mother's devotion to St. Eduvigis, a polish duchess known for her ministry among the poor. As César remembers, on the saint's feast day, his mother "would go out purposely to look for someone in need, give him something, and never take anything in return. If a man was selling pencils, she would give him some money but wouldn't take a pencil. She would look for people who were hungry to come to the house. Usually they would offer to do some work, like chop wood, in exchange for the meal, but she would refuse because, she said, the gift then was invalid."<sup>12</sup> Such devotion was instilled in the children who were instructed to be on the lookout for homeless people in need of a home cooked meal.

Later in life, this earthy faith would be fertile ground for the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching. Father Donald McDonnell, a priest who had been part of a missionary group working among migrants, introduced Chávez to the papal social encyclicals. Chávez savored the wisdom of these writings. The union paper *El Malcriado*<sup>13</sup> quoted liberally from papal encyclicals, in particular from Leo XIII's

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Wells, "Cesar Chavez's Protestant Allies: The California Migrant Ministry and the Farm Workers" *Journal of Presbyterian History* Spring (2009):5-16, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003). "Fred Bardacke comments, "What many of the liberals and radicals on the staff of the union could never understand was that all the fasts, the long marches and the insistence on personal sacrifice...were not publicity gimmicks, they were the essential Chavez." (6f.) "Two kinds of people objected to the presence of so much religion in the strike: secular union people who didn't want religion to mix with economics, and conservative religious people who didn't want religion "used" in this way" (12).

<sup>12</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 795).

<sup>13</sup> Chávez started this paper in 1965 to give voice to the struggle for the rights of the farm worker. Though not its editor, Chávez contributed much to the direction and content of the

1891 encyclical on capital and labor, *Rerum Novarum*. For instance, a statement on the Catholic Church's witness against injustice was published in one of the earliest issues of the paper. Several quotes attributed to Leo XIII are followed by social commentary that applies papal teaching to the contemporary situation. Here is one example.

Pope Leo XIII said: Everyone's first duty is to protect the workers from the greed of speculators who use human beings as instruments to provide themselves with money. It is neither just nor human to oppress men with excessive work to the point where their minds become enfeebled and their bodies worn out.<sup>14</sup>

Pope Leo's statement is followed by an application to the current struggle. Agriculture is California's most important industry. It is so profitable that even companies from as far away as England have invested money in California agriculture. Enormous corporations such as that which operate the Sierra Vista Ranch (Di Giorgio Corporation), the California Packing Corporation (Del Monte Products), the Guimarra Corp., and the giant Sunkist orange and lemon cooperative, conduct their business in agriculture on pure speculation. The only reason there is so much profit in these operations is that they pay such low wages.<sup>15</sup>

The text of *Rerum Novarum* that is being paraphrased appears to be the following: "the first thing of all to secure is to save unfortunate working people from the cruelty of men of greed, who use human beings as mere instruments for money-making. It is neither just nor human so to grind men down with excessive labor as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies."<sup>16</sup> The context for this statement is Leo XIII's exposition of the duties of the state with respect to the welfare of the worker. The encyclical insists that the state and the employer must see the worker as more than a worker, but as a human being made in the image of God whose purpose in life is ultimately fulfilled by resting in God. Leo XIII asserts that the state is entrusted with the defense of the spiritual and external welfare of the worker by ensuring protection from labor practices that overtax the body and

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paper, particularly in its first year. Hence, though the choice and wording of the papal quotations cannot be unequivocally attributed to Chávez, these doubtless reflect his spirit and received his approval. On the name of the publication itself see Antonio Orendain explanation in *El Malcriado* 13(1968):10. All references to *El Malcriado* are cited from <http://www.farmworkermovement.org/ufwarchives/>.

<sup>14</sup> *El Malcriado*, 9 (1965):15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Rerum Novarum*, para. 42.



impede the hallowing of time for God. Significantly, the text printed in *El Malcriado* extends the scope of action to all people. It is not only the employer that is responsible for offering a just labor contract, nor is it only the state that is responsible for enforcing such contracts. The workers and all people (consumers too) are responsible for the protection of employees from exploitative practices by certain actors who are called by name (Di Giorgio, Del Monte, etc.).

In other words, the Pope's authority supports the work of community organizing and illuminates the legitimacy of *la causa*. Another example underlines the agency of the worker and the necessity of unions. Leo XIII is quoted as saying that "If a man falls, he should be helped up by another man. Therefore it is desirable that associations of workers multiply and become more effective." The comment that follows reads: "The attempts of the bosses to destroy groups of workers are notorious. During large strikes they organize their own armies in order to try to subdue the workers and make them obey. The big farmers make use of every possible method, legal or illegal, in order to crush the Farm Workers Associations."<sup>17</sup> The quote from Pope Leo is actually a paraphrase and concatenation of two passages from *Rerum Novarum* which are rightly utilized to shore up the importance of unionization for the welfare of the worker and the community.<sup>18</sup>

Catholic social teaching resonated with the lessons in Christianity that he had learned at home from his mother and grandmother. In the words of Frederick Dalton, "Catholic social teaching provided a way of expressing in theological and

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<sup>17</sup> *El Malcriado*, 9 (1965):15.

<sup>18</sup> The passages are *Rerum Novarum*, para. 50 ("The consciousness of his own weakness urges man to call in aid from without. We read in the pages of holy Writ: "It is better that two should be together than one; for they have the advantage of their society. If one fall he shall be supported by the other. Woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up." And further: "A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city." It is this natural impulse which binds men together in civil society; and it is likewise this which leads them to join together in associations which are, it is true, lesser and not independent societies, but, nevertheless, real societies.") and para. 57: "To sum up, then, We may lay it down as a general and lasting law that working men's associations should be so organized and governed as to furnish the best and most suitable means for attaining what is aimed at, that is to say, for helping each individual member to better his condition to the utmost in body, soul, and property."

philosophical language the values and insights that had been passed on to him through the wisdom and practices of popular Catholicism.”<sup>19</sup>

Chávez's theological vision of social engagement is woven from more threads than Catholic social teaching. There are ecumenical and interreligious strands in his vision of the human, which is precisely what one should expect in a Christian humanist. Jesus's words to his disciples in Mark 9:40 are worth reading in this connection: "Whoever is not against us is for us." Nothing that is truly human is opposed to the gospel.

First, Chávez reached out to Protestants at a time when many Catholics did not consider them Christian. One of his closest colleagues was Chris Hartmire, a Presbyterian minister.<sup>20</sup> The inspiration for singing at the union meetings came from Chávez's "accidental" attendance of a Latino Pentecostal worship service in Madera during the early days of his organizing work.<sup>21</sup>

Second, as a committed Catholic, Chávez did not think that Catholicism or Christianity had a monopoly on truth. Saul Alinsky's lessons on community organizing were crucial for Chávez. Just as, if not even more significant, were Mahatma Gandhi's teaching on nonviolence. Chávez had great personal admiration for Gandhi's life and philosophy; he read Louis Fischer's classic biography on this extraordinary human being and a large picture of the pacifist revolutionary graced his office. In Gandhi, Chávez found an integration of message and messenger that inspired his organizing work as moral jujitsu where you keep

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<sup>19</sup> Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez*, 49.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Wells, "Cesar Chavez's Protestant Allies: The California Migrant Ministry and the Farm Workers" *Journal of Presbyterian History Spring (2009):* 5-16.

<sup>21</sup> The preacher was having all kinds of problems with his immigration status. César visited his home just when the preacher was getting ready to have a service in the living room which served as the sanctuary for this little flock. As Chávez remembers: "So in that little Madera church, I observed everything going on about me that could be useful in organizing. Although there were no more than twelve men and women, there was more spirit there than when I went to a mass where there could be two hundred. Everybody was happy. They all were singing. These people were really committed in their beliefs, and this made them sing and clap and participate. I liked that... I think that's where I got the idea of singing at the meetings. That was one of the first things we did when I started the Union. And it was hard for me because I can't carry a tune." Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 2216).



your opponents off balance while remaining true to your principles. Indeed, Martin Luther King, Jr. saw in Chávez an exemplar of the teachings of Ghandi.<sup>22</sup>

From these Mexican, Catholic, ecumenical and interreligious roots César Chávez's Christian humanism grew, but its fruitfulness required pruning. For César's vision of the dignity of the human to become a powerful motivator of social change, he needed to enter the desert and learn how to wage war not only with material means but also with spiritual weapons, for some demons cannot be cast out except by prayer and fasting.<sup>23</sup>

## V. The Weapons of Christian Humanism

When I began the process of starting a Latino church in Durham, North Carolina, I looked for every available opportunity to meet others who were working among Latinos. On one occasion, I attended a training event for farm worker advocacy. The events involved lessons on community organizing, power dynamics, identification of self-interests and the like. During lunch a number of us had the opportunity to talk to several farm workers. One of my friends asked a middle-aged woman, whose name escapes me, how people like us could help. Her quick and honest answer was pray. To which my friend hastily said, yes but what else?

Chávez's long fasts provoked significant confusion and even derision among friends and foes. Saul Alinsky found the fast puzzling, even "embarrassing". Some saw him playing the martyr. Still others saw it as a publicity stunt, or even a ruse (he did not really fast!). Dolores Huerta attempted to interpret the fast in these terms: "I know it's hard for people who are not Mexican to understand, but this is part of the Mexican culture—the penance, the whole idea of suffering for something, of self-inflicted punishment .... Cesar has often mentioned in speeches

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<sup>22</sup> As King writes in a telegram to Chávez: "I am deeply moved by your courage in fasting, as your personal sacrifice for justice through non-violence. Your past and present commitment is eloquent testimony to the constructive power of non-violent action and the destructive impotence of violent reprisal. You stand today as a living example of the Ghandian tradition with its great force for social progress and its healing spiritual powers. My colleagues and I commend you for your bravery, salute you for your indefatigable work against poverty and injustice, and pray for your health and continuing service as one of the outstanding men of America. The plight of your people and ours is so grave that we all desperately need the inspiring example and effective leadership you have given." Cited in *El Malcriado* 4(1968): 4.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 9:29, variant reading.

that we will not win through violence, we will win through fasting and prayer."<sup>24</sup> Stephen Lloyd-Moffet has it right: "For the popular press and many scholars, the extended fasts were assumed to be protest fasts: hunger strikes to call attention to a specific injustice, but Chávez consistently and categorically states otherwise. His goal was not to incite change in others—which would be consistent for a protest fast—but a personal spiritual transformation."<sup>25</sup> In Chávez's own words,

The fast was not intended as a pressure against any growers. For that reason we have suspended negotiations and arbitration proceedings and relaxed the militant picketing and boycotting during the fast period. I undertook this Fast because my heart was filled with grief and pain for the suffering of farm workers. The Fast was first for me and then for all of us in the Union. It was a Fast for non-violence and a call to sacrifice.<sup>26</sup>

I find it significant that Chávez heard the call to be human most clearly when, at the end of a long fast, his strength was gone. In describing his experience during the long fasts, César highlights two elements, the physical pain and the intellectual clarity. On the one hand, the fasts took their toll on César's body. He suffered sleeplessness, back pain, kidney problems. On the other hand he speaks of an enhanced level of awareness. The weaker he became the better he could hear and see. As he explains: "You are able to see things in a different light—see other people and yourself in a different light...it is easier to find solutions and be able to detach yourself much, much more completely...vastly more profound and yet removed."<sup>27</sup>

A few comments on the transforming power of these fasts.

First, the fast helped Chávez to see humanity in a clearer light. He saw that humans are not defined by what they have but by how they live. To be human is not to be looking out for number one, but to love, and in a world plagued by evils

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Claire E. Wolfteich, "Devotion and the Struggle for Justice in the Farm Worker Movement: A Practical Theological Approach to Research and Teaching in Spirituality" *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5.2 (2005): 158-175, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen R. Lloyd-Moffett, "The Mysticism and Social Action of César Chávez", 35-51, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Wells, "Cesar Chavez's Protestant Allies: The California Migrant Ministry and the Farm Workers" *Journal of Presbyterian History* Spring (2009):5-16, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen R. Lloyd-Moffett, "The Mysticism and Social Action of César Chávez", 35-51, 39.



and injustices of all kinds, love calls for voluntary self-sacrifice. Chávez saw that in the struggle to be human, only by giving ourselves up for others, do we find ourselves.

Chávez's vision of the human is not airbrushed. He strongly chastises those who romanticize the poor. "Look, you're here working with a group of men; the farm worker is only a human being. You take the poorest of these guys and give him that ranch over there, he could be just as much of a bastard as the guy sitting there right now. Or if you think that all growers are bastards, you're no good to us either. Remember that both are *men*. In order to help the farm workers, look at them as human beings and not as something extra special, or else you are kidding yourself and are going to be mighty disappointed."<sup>28</sup> César did not see a contradiction between human fallibility and human dignity. Humans have dignity not because they are saints but because they are humans!

Second, the fast helped Chávez to see the labor struggle in a different light. "Fighting for social injustice," Chávez states, "is one of the most profound ways in which men can say "yes" to man's dignity. And keeping silent about the issues is probably one of the most effective ways of saying "no" to man's dignity...I think that saying "yes" to man's dignity really means sacrifice. There is no way on this earth in which one can say "yes" to man's dignity and know that one is going to be spared some sacrifice."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, saying "yes" to the dignity of others helps that person to recognize their own worth. As Chávez recalls, "One of the most beautiful and satisfying results of our work in establishing a union in the fields is in witnessing the worker's bloom—the natural dignity coming out of a man when his dignity is recognized. Even some of the employers are seeing this point. Workers whom they previously had treated as dumb members of a forgotten minority suddenly are blooming as capable, intelligent persons using initiative and showing leadership."<sup>30</sup> The dignity of the human blossoms when it is recognized. In the hands of Chávez, unionizing becomes a humanizing activity.

Finally, the fasts allowed Chávez to speak and act with new power. "You speak then from that experience of fasting while you are fasting...you are really talking

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 81f.

<sup>29</sup> *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 9375).

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 82.

about nonviolence in a different light, in a different authority, with a lot of authority."<sup>31</sup> Gandhi's Satyagraha, the "truth force" stirred up by the extended fast is not to be resisted. An emaciated human body that undergoes suffering voluntarily for the sake of others has the power to change the world.

There are more weapons in the arsenal of Chávez's humanism than fasting. Certainly, there is prayer and Eucharist. But in addition to these spiritual weapons, the role of material non-violent weapons like strikes and boycotts cannot be underestimated. Both spiritual means and material means are necessary weapons in the struggle for the integrity and dignity of the human. Fasts, boycotts, marches, and prayers are necessary because, as Maritain argues, the human being is both material and spiritual, an individual and a person. However, spiritual means are more radical than material means because they go to the root of the human. Precisely, because spiritual means are more radical, their effects are often more hidden, since roots are buried underground.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Stephen R. Lloyd-Moffett, "The Mysticism and Social Action of César Chávez", 35-51, 39.

<sup>32</sup> The distinction of two orders of means opens the possibility of two ways of life, one that is oriented toward action, the other toward contemplation. Maritain's attempt to justify his decision to join the order of The Little Brothers to Saul Alinsky sheds light on these two ways. "In the Christian perspective (I mean genuinely Christian) love for the neighbor implies two kinds of gift of oneself or readiness to die for him: 1) in order to make his earthly life worthy of man, by struggling for justice here below; 2) in order to help him in his need for eternal life and divine grace, by sharing in the sacrifice of Christ which continues in his members. Both kinds of actual gift of oneself are *necessary*. Yet the human condition obliges each one of us to give priority to the one or to the other." (94) Alinsky chooses the first while almost unconsciously affirming the importance of the second. Maritain, in joining The Little Brothers chooses the second while not neglecting to act in the first according to his new set of possibilities. "In both cases love itself is invisible, yet there are certain manifestations of it (either for fighting for and with the poor and the oppressed, organizing them, helping them to conquer power, etc. or existing with them and sharing in their very poverty, so that Christ's love may be present among them and witnessed to). But in the first case the efficacy of the means employed is visible and tangible (these means produce visible changes in the social fabric); in the second case the efficacy remains invisible (the means in question, which essentially consist of dying with Christ, result in invisible transformations in souls by God-given grace). And of such transformations as a rule, nobody perceives even an indirect sign." (*The Philosopher and the Provocateur*, 95).



## VI. Christian Humanism and Comprehensive Immigration Reform

I began this paper by suggesting that Chávez's vision of the human as one who suffers for others and his invocation of God in the struggle to be human offers an important corrective to the anthropological assumptions guiding much of the national conversation on immigration. I want to make this contribution more explicit by bringing Maritain's philosophical Christian humanism together with Chávez's practical Christian humanism into the conversation. The remarks here can only be suggestive given the scope of this paper.

What does it mean to be human? All proposals for immigration reform presuppose and promote a certain understanding of human society. For those who believe in a strong account of national sovereignty, to be a human is to be a minuteman, ready to fight for one's rights by our action at a moment's notice unless assurances are given that one's rights are respected.<sup>33</sup> Framing immigration as an issue of national sovereignty has had tremendous consequences for public policy.<sup>34</sup> Consider, for instance, the constriction of questions of human rights to questions of citizenship. Chief Justice Warren's famous dissent in *Perez v. Brownell*, a 1958 a case where a native born person whose citizenship was revoked, is illustrative of the strange consequences of yoking immigration control and sovereignty.

Citizenship is man's basic right for it is nothing less than the right to have rights. Remove this priceless possession and there remains a stateless person, disgraced and degraded in the eyes of his countrymen. He has no lawful claim to protection from any nation, and no nation may assert right on his behalf. His very existence is

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Jeremy A. Rabkin, *Law without Nations?*, 44. In contrast, "The image of humanity that is presupposed by enthusiasts of global governance is of people who are helpless, supine, needy, and ready to obey anything offered up to them as "help" so global managers can secure peace if given enough scope" (44).

<sup>34</sup> Immigration historian, Mae Ngai, states that "For one, it has allowed Congress to create, as even the Supreme Court described, "rules that would be unacceptable if applied to citizens". Second, it has marginalized or erased other issues from consideration in policy formation, such as human rights and the global distribution of wealth." See Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 12. See also Gerald Neuman, *Strangers to the Constitution: Immigrants, Borders, and Fundamental Law*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), and for a more restrictive reading of immigration policy see Peter C. Meileander, *Toward a Theory of Immigration*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

at the sufferance of the state within whose border he happens to be. In this country the expatriate will presumably enjoy, at most, only the limited rights and privileges of aliens, and like the alien he might even be subject to deportation and thereby deprived of the right to assert any rights.<sup>35</sup>

With all due respect to Chief Justice Warren, subsuming all rights under citizenship is an anthropological error. Humans do not have rights because they are citizens; humans have rights because they are human. The state is not the author of human rights but its servant and protector. Casting national sovereignty as an absolute is a mistake. Borders are meant to serve the common good.<sup>36</sup> In a society that conceives of human beings as autonomous individuals, borders serve the common good defined in terms of material values and goods. Borders protect individuals from the neighbor whose need is a potential threat to his or her well-being. In a society that conceives of human beings as persons in communion, borders serve a common good where material values and goods are oriented toward and permeated by spiritual values and goods. Borders help persons discern who is near and who is far in order to triage the loving service of all. A Christian humanism as taught by Maritain and fought for by Chávez promotes a personalist society over against an individualist one. Truly comprehensive immigration reform will be possible only when guided by a comprehensive vision of the human as individual and person.

At this point the objection might be raised that Chávez was not consistent in this teaching. Consider his dogged opposition to the *Bracero* program. From 1942 to 1964, the *Bracero* program provided a steady flow of Mexican migrants into the United States.<sup>37</sup> The demise of the program was the result of grassroots resistance

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<sup>35</sup> Cited in Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 229.

<sup>36</sup> Drew Christiansen, "Movement, Asylum, Borders: Christian Perspectives", *International Migration Review*, 30.1 (1996): 7-17. "A case can be made in terms of the common good for the importance of borders in that they create stable conditions under which governments can achieve the national common good in predictable ways and with a minimum of conflict." (15) See also Ana Bedard, "Us versus Them? U.S. Immigration and the Common Good", *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 28.2 (2008):117-140.

<sup>37</sup> Mae Ngai avers that: "The decision to use foreign contract labor was a momentous break with past policy and practice. The United States had outlawed foreign contract labor in 1885. Since the time of the Civil War, Americans had believed that contract labor, like slavery, was the antithesis of free labor, upon which democracy depended." The Truman administration introduced the program as a way to meet the needs of the farm labor market



by people like César Chávez. As one Latino activist put it: "Naturally, we feel sorry for the braceros. We want to do what we can to see that they are exploited as little as possible up here. After all, our own parents were in pretty much the same position as the braceros a generation ago...But look at what the program is doing to us. We're trying to climb our way up the social ladder...It's a hard enough fight, at best. The braceros come along, and hang on to the tail of our shirts. We can't brush them off, because that wouldn't be human. But their weight is dragging us down."<sup>38</sup> Chávez understood the plight of the *bracero*. He clashed with them at the picket line when they were brought in by employers as scabs. He also worshipped with them at their camps, when Chávez assisted Father McDonnell with the celebration of the mass.<sup>39</sup> Chávez saw the *Bracero* program for what it was a tool to dehumanize and exploit both farm worker and immigrant. The *braceros* "were poor when they came, and were poor when they went back."<sup>40</sup> The types of concerns raised by Chávez and other activists about the way in which immigration contributes to unemployment and underemployment among people who are marginalized by mainstream society are not lightly to be set aside because they raise important questions concerning human solidarity. Chávez's struggle against the *Bracero* program is his way of saying "yes" to being human in the face of an entrenched "no."

When César cries out: God help us to be men! he is not adding a pious coda to a humanitarian appeal. The plea is an acknowledgement of the difficulty of the struggle. It is easy to give myself to the neighbor in the abstract, but giving myself to the one who stole my job is another thing altogether. César understood better than most the difficult judgments that the struggle for justice entailed, and he is convinced that without divine assistance he will fail. Chávez would surely counsel all social reformers to heed Maritain's advice: "you can only transform the social regime of the world by effecting at the same time, and first of all within yourselves, a renewal of spiritual life and of moral life, by digging down to the spiritual and moral foundations of human life."<sup>41</sup>

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and curtailing while curtailing illegal immigration. Ironically, the program had the opposite effect. More Mexicans came illegally into the country because there were more jobseekers than *bracer* slots. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 148.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 159.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 1807).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* (Kindle Version, 2471).

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World*, 74f.

## Conclusion: The Courage to be Human

As I conclude these reflections, I am mindful of Chávez's cautionary remarks on bookish people. According to Chávez "just talking about change is not going to bring it about. Talk just gives people an out. Generally what happens is that people will study nonviolence, read books, go to seminars where they discuss nonviolence, and attend endless meetings."<sup>42</sup> The practical as distinct from (but not opposed to) speculative character of Chávez's humanism compels us to go beyond definitions and elucidations. Once the nature of our humanity is seen then the question arises: dare we be human?

Dare we be human? Dare we live in gratitude and generosity with the neighbor? Dare we risk some our individual autonomy so that others might flourish in their personhood? After all, as Jesus solemnly declares: "those who want to save their life will lose."<sup>43</sup> And as Chávez states (echoing Jesus): "Only by giving our lives, do we find life".<sup>44</sup> Dare we suffer? The status quo has its defenders and there is every reason to expect resistance without and within. The weight of social custom and our disordered desires weigh us down and threaten to flatten us into mere individuals. Few are able to carry on the struggle for reform when its continuation requires embracing poverty, losing civil rights, and experiencing stigmatization or persecution.

Do we dare? Dare we stick around? Dare we persevere in the struggle? Chávez understood well that the cause of humanizing unjust conditions requires a level of commitment bordering on obsession.<sup>45</sup> Courage is called for and courage involves action. Since the human being is two dimensional, it follows that human action is both individual and personal. These two dimensions of human acts distinguish two orders of means of struggle and two kinds of courage. As Maritain explains, "The first of these orders derives its efficacy in the last resort from the body and from the transitive activity that is proper to matter: the second derives its efficacy from

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<sup>42</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 3524).

<sup>43</sup> Mark 8:35

<sup>44</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 5059).

<sup>45</sup> "When it comes to organizing all the farm workers, I'm a fanatic, and I look for other fanatics, the ones that really want to get the job done. The desire to win has got to be very strong, or else you can't do it. An organizer must have a commitment—it's going to be done! I don't know how, but it's got to be done!" Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 2929).



the soul and from the immanent activity that is proper to the spirit."<sup>46</sup> The exemplar of the former is the warrior. The exemplar of the latter, the martyr. The chief weapon of the warrior is the sword, of the martyr, the cross. The principal act of courage is not the act of attacking (*aggredi*) but the act of enduring (*sustinere*).<sup>47</sup> The courage to attack draws its power from material principles, from one's individuality, from our physical attributes, technical skills, material resources. The courage to endure draws its power from spiritual principles, from the depths of human personhood, from being made in the image of God. Chávez's prophetic declaration is worth harkening to again: "the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice."<sup>48</sup> Without vulnerability there is no courage, because the possibility of suffering even unto death is intrinsic to courage. Without justice there is no courage, because the praise of courage depends on the justice of the cause. It is significant that the beatitude that declares blessed those who hunger and thirst for justice is closely associated with courage. For only those willing to undergo suffering for justice will be satisfied. Dare we stand out? Courage is called for, but courage is rare. And yet, we must not discount the power of the small group or even the single person to effect change. Where such men and women are found, then however hostile the environment, a holistic and liberating humanism can take root and spread through the society.<sup>49</sup> Of course, there is the danger of false prophets. Yet, there is also the possibility of saints.

Dare we hope? In *la causa*, hope of victory is intrinsic to courage. Sí, se puede. But hope is not optimism. It is not based on rational calculus of the odds. Nor does hope spring from a sunny disposition. Hope considers a good that is difficult but attainable with extra effort or help from others. The chief expression of hope is prayer. Hope breathes through prayer, as Thomas Aquinas rightly said.<sup>50</sup> In prayer, we learn to desire what is truly desirable; we learn patience; we acknowledge how weak we are, and how lofty our dreams are. And in prayer, we learn that we are not

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<sup>46</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World, The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain*, Vol. XI (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 90.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Kindle Version, 5059).

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World*, 94.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 2-2.17.4.

alone, but that we have a friend on whom we can depend on for assistance. Hence, I close by citing the words of a prayer composed by César Chávez for the campesino struggling, daring to be human.

Show me the suffering of the most miserable; so I will know my people's plight.

Free me to pray for others; for you are present in every person.

Help me take responsibility for my own life; so that I can be free at last.

Grant me courage to serve others; for in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience; so that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration; so that the Spirit will be alive among us.

Let the Spirit flourish and grow; so that we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice; for they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hates us; so we can change the world. Amen.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Cited in Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez*, 155f.



## Resumen

Una de las mejores maneras de entender la vida y extender la obra de César Chávez es interpretándolo en diálogo con el humanismo cristiano que tiene su origen en el pensamiento del filósofo tomista, Jacques Maritain. Este tipo de humanismo considera al ser humano de una perspectiva "personalista" y promueve una sociedad donde la persona en su integridad total como alma y cuerpo se torna al prójimo en generosidad y a Dios en gratitud. Chávez es un ejemplo de lo que Jacques Maritain denomina un "santidad secular." En la causa de defender la dignidad humana del migrante, Chávez se ciñe de instrumentos materiales y espirituales, de la huelga y el ayuno, y redescubre una verdad cristiana: el que tiene hambre y sed de justicia tiene que pasar tiempo en el desierto. El ejemplo de Chávez nos reta a asumir la causa de la justicia buscando el camino estrecho entre el quietismo piadoso y el activismo puro.

# Qué lindo es mi Cristo:<sup>1</sup>

## El Jesús/Cristo Erótico en la Música Cristiana Protestante Caribeña, Latinoamericana y Latina<sup>2</sup>

*Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, Ph.D.*

### I. Introducción

En un magnífico ensayo sobre espiritualidad y sexualidad,<sup>3</sup> Lee Butler comenta sobre la retórica popular de la sexualidad y la espiritualidad protestante caribeña y latina. Él observa que:

Cuando se pregunta a la mayoría de los cristianos qué piensan con respecto a cuestiones del cuerpo; nociones de pureza son, con frecuencia, centrales para dichas consideraciones. La ideología que resuena en la comunidad cristiana es que el cuerpo es un templo y que siempre debemos esforzarnos para mantener puro dicho templo. Estas ideas son un tanto penetrantes debido a una profunda noción de que el cuerpo y las actividades corporales son pecaminosas, corruptas e impuras. Dicho entendimiento ha resultado con frecuencia en un intento por ser incorpóreo. Al sentir que las actividades impuras del cuerpo son inevitables, los cristianos han atentado minimizar o escapar de su cuerpo en el nombre de la santificación.<sup>4</sup>

Butler reconoce, sin embargo, que la espiritualidad africana –y, yo añadiría la caribeña, latinoamericana y latina– “... es la integración activa de nuestra humanidad, resultando en un esfuerzo singularmente dirigido a estar en comunión con Dios y con los otros. Es el espíritu humano moviéndose y siendo arrastrado

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<sup>1</sup> *Qué lindo es mi Cristo* es el título de uno de los himnos discutidos en este ensayo.

<sup>2</sup> Esta es una versión brevemente revisada del ensayo “Qué lindo es mi Cristo: The Erotic Jesus/Christ in the Caribbean, Latin American, and Latina/o Protestant Christian Music,” un capítulo en *Jesus in the Hispanic Community*, Harold Recinos & Hugo Magallanes, eds. (Westminster John Knox, 2009). La versión en inglés contiene las letras y páginas en la red cibernetica donde los lectores pueden encontrar las representaciones e interpretaciones de los himnos y coritos.

<sup>3</sup> Lee Butler, “The Spirit is Willing and the Flesh is Too: Living Whole and Holy Lives Through Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality,” capítulo en *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, Anthony Pinn y Dwight N. Hopkins, eds. (Macmillan: Palgrave, 2004), 111-120.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.



hacia el espíritu de Dios.”<sup>5</sup> Es a través de esta integración, una debatida respuesta humana a la división entre cuerpo y espíritu, que descubrimos expresiones inesperadas que desafían implícitamente la retórica que divide al cuerpo del espíritu en muchas comunidades protestantes caribeñas, latinoamericanas y latinas.

En este ensayo examinaré himnos y coritos<sup>6</sup> protestantes populares caribeños, latinos y latinoamericanos que expresan una relación única entre la espiritualidad y lo erótico. El discurso teológico dominante en nuestras comunidades, por mucho tiempo, ha negado un lenguaje espiritual erótico explícito mientras que, en contraste, nuestra música, letras y alabanza invitan al cuerpo a trenzarse con el poder seductor del Espíritu Santo.<sup>7</sup> Por lo tanto, propongo tres objetivos para el presente ensayo. Primero, identificar el lenguaje erótico explícito en algunas de nuestras producciones musicales populares. Segundo, identificar dicho lenguaje en las formas en que las comunidades latinas nombran y se relacionan con Jesucristo—el Jesús erótico. Y finalmente, sugerir que cuando nuestras comunidades redescubren este Jesús erótico, como comunidad cristiana somos capaces de comprometernos en actividades de formación espiritual que comienzan a desafiar la división entre cuerpo y espíritu, y a desarrollar una espiritualidad cristiana contextual con nuestros ingredientes eróticos. Más aún, tal capacidad de compromiso es un desafío a una conversación en nuestras comunidades sobre la espiritualidad y la sexualidad humana.

## II. Algunas Consideraciones Teológicas e Históricas

Hay una semejanza importante entre el cristianismo africano y el cristianismo caribeño, latinoamericano y latino. Ambas expresiones cristianas buscan “una disciplina ‘comunicativa’ en la que la pregunta predominante es “¿Cuál es la mejor forma de hacer teología con el fin de que el Evangelio toque de manera más profunda a los caribeños, latinoamericanos y latinos?”<sup>8</sup> Mientras que el enfoque en

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>6</sup> *Coritos* es el término usado por congregaciones latinas para referirse a canciones cristianas.

<sup>7</sup> No hay la menor duda que nuestro legado histórico erótico se remonta al siglo XVI con las experiencias místicas de Santa Teresa de Ávila y San Juan de la Cruz. No obstante, por limitaciones de espacio no discutiré las posibles conexiones históricas y teológicas entre los místicos españoles y la música popular protestante erótica discutida en este ensayo.

<sup>8</sup> Kwame Bediako, “Whose Religion is Christianity?” *Reflections on Opportunities and Challenges in Christian Theological Scholarship: The African Dimension*, capítulo en *Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Exploring the Five Marks of the Global Mission*, Andrew Walls y Cathy Ross, eds. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 110.

varios círculos cristianos occidentales es el articular una teología denominacional o confesional,<sup>9</sup> establecer límites y reclamar una identidad particular y frecuentemente rígida; muchas comunidades cristianas africanas, asiáticas, caribeñas, latinoamericanas y latinas articulan la experiencia del Evangelio en términos de «acción comunicativa». El enfoque de nuestra teología y prácticas ministeriales radica en una arriesgada transmisión de la experiencia del Evangelio profundamente biográfica, contextual, llena de lenguaje cotidiano, y que propone un cimiento e identidades religiosas alternativas que descubran a un ser humano sano e integral. Esto no es siempre el caso. No obstante, hay mucha gestión teológica de arraigo popular y profundamente contextual que ofrece una visión sanadora e integrada del ser humana.

Más aún, mientras que varios cristianos occidentales se concentran en una autogestión teológica para mejorar “lo que tenemos,”; cristianos, asiáticos, caribeños, latinoamericanos y latinos usualmente se concentran en “*ofrecer* lo que tenemos” con el fin de que todos busquemos ser mejores. Recalco que las comunidades cristianas en Africa, Asia, América Latina, el Caribe y comunidades inmigrantes de estas regiones *ofrecen* su teología en una gestión evangelizadora popular y no en una propuesta doctrinal coherente con expectativas denominacionales.

Esta «acción comunicativa», este ofrecimiento teológico evangelizador es testimonio encarnado.<sup>10</sup> La producción musical popular y el uso de himnos y *coritos* locales es un testimonio de la experiencia de la gente con el evangelio de Jesucristo y su agencia como comunicadores de dicho evangelio a la comunidad extendida. ¡Por lo tanto, ésta es teología profundamente cimentada en la práctica misionera comunitaria! Mientras que muchos teólogos protestantes caribeños, latinoamericanos y latinos encuentran una división entre cuerpo y espíritu en las formulaciones teológicas clásicas y proponen correcciones y pautas teológicas formales para enmendar dicha ruptura,<sup>11</sup> frecuentemente ignoramos cómo nuestros

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Para una mayor discusión con respecto al testimonio como practica de misión, acción comunicativa y práctica congregacional vea mis ensayos "Mission at the Border," capítulo en *Teaching Mission in a Global Context*, Patricia Loyde-Siddle y Bonnie Sue Lewis, eds. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001), 25-39 y "What Makes Preaching 'Missional'?" *Journal for Preachers* XXII.4 (Pentecostés 1999): 3-9.

<sup>11</sup> La contribución de teólogas feministas y mujeristas caribeñas, latinoamericanas y latinas ha sido crucial en mi propio reconocimiento de la importancia de los asuntos del cuerpo. Sin esta contribución hubiera sido imposible mirar estos himnos y *coritos* con lo



autores y artistas protestantes corrigen tan dañina división e intentan corregirla con su creatividad musical, artística y teológica. Su perspectiva teológica usualmente prueba tener acceso inmediato a través de la acción comunicativa de un evangelio transformador experimentado en comunidad. Tiene una presencia mucho más permeable e integradora, ya que es una actividad comunicativa y comunal. Desafortunadamente, en ocasiones esta actividad pasa desapercibida y es acorralada dentro del marco doctrinal muchas más tradicional y ligado a intereses denominacionales y no al ejercicio creativo de teologías contextuales.

Al describir esta misma situación en el contexto africano, -con respecto al mundo de los espíritus y exorcismos- el antropólogo Todd M. Vanden Berg provee una esclarecedora declaración de los límites y riesgos ideológicos que enfrenta el teólogo profesional y la potencial riqueza teológica en lo popular. Él afirma:

A nivel terrenal, el espíritu se mueve de formas misteriosas –aparentemente demasiado misteriosas para algunos teólogos. No sólo la incomodidad de los teólogos refleja la naturaleza y el carácter inusuales de áreas específicas de integración que ocurren en el nivel de lo popular, sino que quizás refleja también el desafío que sienten con respecto a asuntos de identidad, poder y autoridad...<sup>12</sup>

A mi parecer, los himnos y *coritos* discutidos en el presente ensayo son una integración del cuerpo y el espíritu: una expresión erótica de la relación con Dios. Son la propuesta teológica popular que desafía una retórica cristiana clásica anti-corporal y una teología clásica protestante que afirma la división entre cuerpo y espíritu producto del taboo y obsesión sexual/erótica humana que existe en muchas de nuestras comunidades protestantes caribeñas, latinoamericanas y latinas.<sup>13</sup>

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que llamo "un ojo erótico." Mi crítica no es en relación a las contribuciones teológicas formales, sino a la falsa suposición de que lo popular no ha lidiado con la división entre cuerpo y espíritu en nuestras comunidades protestantes. Para mayor información con respecto a las más recientes referencias bibliográficas en relación a estos temas, vea: María Pilar Aquino y María José Rosado Núñez, *Feminist Inter-cultural Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007) y Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Todd M. Vanden Berg, "Culture, Christianity, and Witchcraft in a West African Context," capítulo en *The Changing Face of Christianity*, Lamin Sanneh y Joel Carpenter, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Desafortunadamente, muchos líderes y teólogos cristianos espiritualizan estos himnos y *coritos*, domesticando la integración de cuerpo y espíritu. Sin embargo, los recursos están disponibles, son accesibles y son frecuentemente utilizados por la comunidad. Como cualquier símbolo bueno y vital, contiene capas de significado esperando ser desenvueltas.

A pesar de que no estoy siguiendo un orden cronológico estricto, los himnos y *coritos* representan tres etapas diferentes en el cristianismo protestante caribeño, latinoamericano y latino.<sup>14</sup> Me concentro en la explícita representación erótica de Jesucristo y su relación con creyentes y no creyentes, y no en el desarrollo histórico del pensamiento y prácticas de alabanza protestantes populares.<sup>15</sup> La primera etapa histórica, representada por el puertorriqueño Rafael Cuna, nace en la década de los años cuarenta y representa la primera producción musical de la primera generación de protestantes puertorriqueños. La segunda etapa, representada por el mexicano Antonio Rivera y el mexicano-americano Freddie Durán, abarca aproximadamente desde mediados de los años sesenta hasta mediados de los años setenta. Rivera y Durán representan el grupo de la segunda generación de protestantes mexicanos y mexicano-americanos. La tercera etapa, representada por Abigail Ortega, es la expresión juvenil contemporánea Latina/Hispana que comprende desde la segunda mitad de los años noventa hasta el presente. Los jóvenes artistas latinos/hispanos contemporáneos son artistas protestantes que representan lo que llamo *encarnaciones transitorias*. Por ejemplo, su estilo musical es diferente al de la generación previa. Asimismo, el trabajo de Cuna tiene una estructura musical distinta a la de los himnos tradicionales traducidos al español que se encuentran típicamente en el himnario *Himnos de la Vida Cristiana*. Rivera y Durán emplean el bolero como medio musical para sus himnos. Mientras tanto, Ortega utiliza el *reggaetón* y el hip-hop para comunicar su experiencia cristiana.

### III. Definiendo lo Erótico

Karen Baker-Fletcher nos recuerda que los griegos “entendían *eros* como una fuerza unificadora.”<sup>16</sup> Ella establece que:

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<sup>14</sup> La letra e interpretación de estos himnos y coritos están accesibles en distintos medios en la red cibernética. Sólo incluyo los últimos himnos por Abigail Ortega cuyo ritmo es hip-hop y no están disponibles en la red.

<sup>15</sup> Uno de los retos de la música protestante popular caribeña y latinoamericana es el encontrar datos históricos precisos. Con excepción de una publicación “oficial” y dos entrevistas, la mayoría de la música viene de dos fuentes: publicaciones locales de himnos y *coritos* sin música -lo cual asume que la gente sabe la música de dichos himnos y *coritos*- y discos compactos recientemente comercializados como *Clásicos de Siempre* o *Música del Ayer* que no contienen las fechas de la producción musical.

<sup>16</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher, “The Erotic in Contemporary Black Women's Writings,” capítulo en *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, Anthony Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds. (Macmillan: Palgrave, 2004), 201.

Las mujeres negras... sospechan con frecuencia de *eros* al asociar nociones populares de lo “erótico” con pornografía o con “hacer algo sucio”... Pero ésta es una noción falsa de *eros* y de lo *erótico* aprendida de estructuras patriarcales que denigran el poder de la mujer (y la *psique del hombre*) para amar en un modo que unifique cuerpo y espíritu.<sup>17</sup>

Baker-Fletcher define *eros* como “el deseo de unión con lo sagrado,” y “el deseo de unión con el otro... Lo erótico satisface más que los gustos físicos y la necesidad sexual. Su poder cura las almas y los huesos.”<sup>18</sup>

Mientras intentamos descubrir lo erótico en los himnos y *coritos* latinos, me basaré en la definición de Baker-Fletcher de *eros* y lo *erótico*; y sugeriré los siguientes criterios adicionales. Primero, lo *erótico* busca intimidad con el cuerpo. Las expresiones de amor y cariño están relacionadas con el cuerpo; la relación es una de cuerpo a cuerpo. Segundo, lo *erótico* nos guía a una experiencia con lo hermoso. Tercero, lo *erótico* utiliza el lenguaje corporal para apuntar hacia una condición espiritual, ya sea una que necesite o que describa redención y liberación. La relación del lenguaje entre cuerpo y espíritu es en sí misma una forma de desafiar la división entre cuerpo y espíritu. Cuarto, el lenguaje *erótico* se refiere a la relación del creyente y/o el no creyente con lo divino –en nuestro caso, las comunidades latinas con Jesucristo- y sin embargo, el lenguaje es intercambiable para referirse a la relación entre dos amantes. Por ejemplo, si cambio el término Dios o Jesucristo en estos himnos y *coritos* por el nombre de mi esposa – Lizzie- describirían parcialmente la naturaleza de nuestra relación amorosa. Finalmente, el poder erótico del lenguaje de estos himnos y *coritos* se multiplica por el género musical utilizado por estos artistas protestantes populares. Jesús como compañero divino imaginado en la melodía de un bolero crea un aura de relación diferente; donde la expectación, el placer, la satisfacción y la fidelidad son encarnados.<sup>19</sup>

#### IV. Himnos y *Coritos*: Redescubriendo al Jesucristo Erótico

Como recordatorio, los objetivos de este ensayo son: identificar el lenguaje *erótico* explícito en algunas de nuestras producciones musicales populares; identificar dicho lenguaje en los diversos modos en que nuestras comunidades nombran y se

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 201-202. Las cursivas son mías.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 202-203.

<sup>19</sup> Nuevamente, estoy muy consciente de nuestra herencia mística proveniente de España en figuras como San Juan de la Cruz y Santa Teresa de Ávila. Debido a limitaciones en el espacio, decidí no discutir las conexiones históricas entre estos místicos y nuestra música erótica protestante caribeña, latinoamericana y latina.



relacionan con Jesucristo —el Jesús *erótico*; y afirmar que cuando nuestras comunidades redescubren este Jesús *erótico* con quien nos relacionamos, la comunidad cristiana es capaz de emplear actividades de formación cristiana que comienzan a desafiar la división entre cuerpo y espíritu y que busquen una integración intencional entre ellos. En esta sección, me concentraré en los primeros dos objetivos.

Como indiqué en una nota abajo, los himnos y coritos, con excepción de la obra de Abigail Ortega, están representados e interpretados en la red cibernética.<sup>20</sup> Esta accesibilidad afirma el carácter popular de estos himnos y coros. La comunidad lectora puede encontrar tanto la lírica como interpretaciones musicales de los mismos. Citaré algunas secciones de los himnos y *coritos* donde considero que el lenguaje erótico es explícito en relación a Jesucristo. Es importante para la comunidad lectora recuerde que estos himnos y *coritos* son canciones congregacionales. Son cantadas como especiales en servicios de alabanza, cantadas por toda la congregación, y celebradas como regalos espirituales y de adoración de la comunidad hacia Jesucristo.

Rafael Cuna es un hijo del *Avivamiento del 33* (una renovación carismática protestante de 1933) en Puerto Rico.<sup>21</sup> Fue miembro de una iglesia Discípulos de Cristo en Puerto Rico pero fue ordenado posteriormente por una de las tradiciones pentecostales en los Estados Unidos. Cuna publicó *Cuna de Flores* en 1948, una colección de himnos y *coritos* que escribió durante esa década. Al referirse a esta publicación personal, él escribe en la introducción,

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<sup>20</sup> La mayoría de estos himnos se encuentran en [www.coroguadalajara.org](http://www.coroguadalajara.org), [www.justsomyrics.com](http://www.justsomyrics.com), [www.stevegreenministries.org/lyrics](http://www.stevegreenministries.org/lyrics), y otras redes. Los himnos también están disponibles en los siguientes himnarios, *Caliz de bendiciones* (Chalice Press, 1996), *Mil voces para celebrar* (Abingdon Press, 1996), y *El himnario presbiteriano* (Geneva Press, 1998). La letra de *Al Abrigo del Altísimo* son de Luz Ester Ríos de Cuna, la esposa de Rafael Cuna. Los siguientes himnos, *Divino compañero*, *Qué lindo es mi Cristo*, y *Vivir Prendado* pueden encontrarse interpretados en [www.Youtube.com](http://www.Youtube.com), con las palabras claves de Marcos Witt y Manuel Bonilla. Otras redes son [www.allthelyrics.com](http://www.allthelyrics.com), [www.justsomyrics.com](http://www.justsomyrics.com), and [www.Esnips.com](http://www.Esnips.com), usando la clave “Vivir Prendado.” Todos estos himnos están disponibles en el “ipod store.”

<sup>21</sup> La información histórica con respecto a Rafael Cuna proviene de una entrevista personal con el Rev. Héctor J. González, ministro ordenado de *La Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Puerto Rico*. Entrevista personal y telefónica, Enero y Febrero de 2009.

La inspiración de algunos de estos himnos fue cosa dramática, pues ciertas veces yendo de camino tuve que detener el vehículo a la orilla de la carretera para escribir la melodía; otras veces levantarme de noche a hacer lo mismo; así en distintos lugares, cuando menos lo esperaba aparecía la melodía.<sup>22</sup>

Cuna, músico educado, comenta con respecto al género de los himnos:

He tratado de incrustar en el pentagrama, el más fiel y exacto sentimiento puro, típico nuestro, el penoso, quejumbroso, tristísimo Modo Menor. Este, es expresado muy ínfimamente en los Himnarios publicados hasta la fecha.<sup>23</sup>

Cuna establece el propósito de su himnario, indicando que:

Las angustias y sinsabores que vencí, me hacen acreedor de un contentamiento espiritual bello, y más bello aún si supiera que estos himnos fuesen un aliciente benéfico y positivo en la salvación de algún alma.<sup>24</sup>

En la introducción *Cuna de Flores*, Cuna establece el tono para los himnos y *coritos*. Son el resultado de un profundo y hermoso gozo espiritual tras conquistar situaciones difíciles. Son testimonios de la intervención de Jesús en su vida; y la inspiración no sólo viene de la vida diaria, sino por medio de actividades cotidianas.

En su himno *El Amor de Dios*, Cuna nombra el amor de Dios en Jesús como una poderosa fuerza que penetra e inspira su vida. Este poderoso amor elimina la rebeldía y consuela, protege, redime y sostiene la del creyente. ¡Un amor tan poderoso sólo puede venir del Señor! Sin embargo, el coro cambia el tono del poder del amor: de uno que transforma a uno que renueva; es dulce, tierno y puro. La yuxtaposición de un amor poderoso que transforma con uno que es tierno y dulce parece ser un juego entre un Dios Omnipotente y un Jesús más íntimo, bello y amoroso. Jesús es amor, y como amor Jesús está cerca, Jesús es íntimo, Jesús da paz, Jesús es consuelo, Jesús es tierno y Jesús es dulce. En otras palabras, *El Amor de Dios* de Cuna es un testimonio del amor de Jesús. El himno enfoca el carácter amoroso de Jesús y en el rol pasivo del creyente (y del no creyente) en la

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<sup>22</sup> Rafael Cuna, *Cuna de Flores* (Puerto Nuevo, Puerto Rico, 1948), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

experiencia de dicho amor. Toda la iniciativa íntima viene de Jesús y el creyente experimenta la penetración e inspiración del amor del Señor de modo tierno y redentor.

El himno *Al Abrigo del Altísimo* de Cuna, basado en el Salmo 91, toma una dirección diferente. Las estrofas dan testimonio del carácter protector de Dios. Dios protegerá al creyente de la obscuridad, de los brazos del tentador, de tropiezos y caídas, y de la muerte. Sin embargo, Cuna enfatiza en este himno la acción de *habitar* en Dios. El creyente conoce el carácter protector y amoroso de Dios; por lo tanto, necesita *querer* habitar en el ser pacífico y amoroso de Dios. El habitar en Dios no sólo resulta en protección, también es una experiencia de placer. El habitar en Dios es un *deleite* y el creyente *goza y alaba por siempre*.

*Divino Compañero* de Antonio Rivera es un tierno recuento de la historia de Emaús en el evangelio de Lucas. En estilo bolero, Rivera describe la abrumadora presencia de Jesús, la cual disipa las sombras y trae consigo la luz del amor. Para Rivera, la luz no se ve, sino se siente calor y amor. La presencia de Jesús en el camino es protectora y consoladora. El coro es una hermosa invitación a Jesús a permanecer, a habitar en el ser del creyente. Rivera invita al Señor a hacer del creyente un lugar de descanso y pide a Jesús aceptar este nuevo hogar. El himno concluye con otra petición: no me dejes solo en el camino, ayúdame hasta el final.

En el himno de Rivera, el creyente toma la iniciativa de *buscar* el amor y la compañía de Jesús. El creyente invita a tener intimidad y una relación permanente de compañía. El reconocer la presencia divina y protectora de Jesús resulta en una *apasionada* invitación de parte del creyente a un acompañamiento permanente en el camino de la fe.

*Qué lindo es mi Cristo* de Freddie Durán revela una relación muy íntima entre el creyente y Jesucristo. Quizás una de las referencias más sorprendentes con respecto a Cristo es que Él es *lindo* –bello. Esta imagen de un Cristo hermoso es enriquecida por el hecho de que este himno es un bolero, un género musical que invita a la intimidad y el deseo. En las estrofas, Durán relaciona la belleza de Cristo con manos tiernas que acarician y arrullan al creyente. Belleza y tiernas caricias son el regalo de Cristo para el creyente y el pecador. Pero Cristo es hermoso porque Él es tierno y amoroso, porque acaricia a quienes lo siguen. Además, la *kenosis* de Cristo, Dios vaciándose en Jesucristo, es la belleza y el íntimo amor de Cristo. La entrega total sólo puede ser encarnada en las tiernas y dulces caricias que Cristo da al creyente y al pecador.



Durán utiliza lenguaje *erótico* para referirse a la *pasión* y la *relación* que Cristo tiene con los creyentes -y lo que Cristo ofrece al no creyente. Durán toma la imagen de Cristo a un nuevo nivel. Las manos de Cristo son tiernas y esas manos acarician al creyente. Adicionalmente, para Durán, las tiernas manos y caricias llenan el alma del creyente con amor. Después del tierno toque de Cristo, el creyente encuentra en la voz de Cristo una afirmación de amor.

*Vivir prendado* es un himno anónimo que sigue el mismo patrón *erótico* de *Qué lindo es mi Cristo* de Durán. Las estrofas muestran inmediatamente la necesidad del creyente de estar cerca de Cristo. Las imágenes de cercanía, basadas en el evangelio de Juan y la ascensión tradicional de que Juan es el discípulo amado, son tiernas y místicas. El autor desea *reposar* en el pecho de Jesús, *sentir* el latir del corazón de Jesús, escuchar de cerca los sagrados secretos de Cristo. Con un ritmo de *paso-doble*, el himno infunde la urgencia de este íntimo encuentro —un encuentro que genera valor. Interesantemente, la frase *vivir prendado* es comúnmente usada para referirse un profundo apego a alguien. Al compartir la letra de este himno con un colega, él preguntó inmediatamente si era un poema del místico español San Juan de la Cruz. En *Vivir prendado* la agencia *erótica* cae en el creyente. Éste desea el encuentro cercano con el cuerpo de Jesús.

Quizás el ritmo y las letras más sorprendentes vienen de Abigail Ortega, una joven latina de Georgia. Al ritmo de *reggaetón* y hip-hop, *Acaríciame* nombra lo que Ortega necesita del Señor: ¡una caricia! En su primer himno, el deseo de la caricia de Cristo refleja sus necesidades —ella está sola, abrumada y necesita ayuda. Necesita la caricia de Cristo porque está sufriendo abandono, incertidumbre y cansancio. El deseo de cariño es radicalmente expresado en un ritmo seductor y con la típica repetición que induce una demanda: *acaríciame, acaríciame, acaríciame*. En la segunda estrofa, ella sufre y quiere reír, quiere que su dolor cese. Quiere que su vida sea una de gozo y eso sólo ocurre cuando está cerca de Cristo.

El segundo himno de Ortega, *Mi Testimonio*, narra el contexto de su vida y familia. Los diversos modos en los que nombra su sufrimiento, el caos en las relaciones familiares y su propio y devastado ser dependen totalmente de imágenes de relaciones y del cuerpo. Quizás la traducción en inglés no captura lo fuerte que es el lenguaje corporal en español, especialmente cuando dice, *con un padre no de sangre, por qué siento dolor, por qué mi vida no tiene calor, mi corazón se está muriendo por falta de amor*. Todas estas frases colocan el sufrimiento de Ortega en la intersección del cuerpo y el espíritu.

La narrativa de redención de Ortega es breve, pero directa al grano. Ella regresa quizás al tema común: *alguien me abrazó, alguien me acarició, me dijo ¡yo te amo!* También incluye en su himno el término *Mija*, término cariñoso utilizado entre mexicanos y mexicano-americanos. Es una abreviación tierna y amorosa del término "mi hija." Ortega concluye su testimonio con afirmaciones de las obras de Cristo en su vida y la seguridad total de que ella confía sólo en él; y todo ello debido a un abrazo, una caricia y las mayores palabras de amor de Jesucristo: "Te amo!"

## V. Conclusión

Estos himnos y *coritos* son una «acción comunicativa erótica». Jesucristo es retratado como aquél cuyo amor es encarnado en intimidad, cercanía, caricia y abrazo. El poder de Cristo contra el mal es canalizado por medio de imágenes de ternura e intimidad, no conflicto y guerra. La naturaleza erótica de Jesucristo conquista los miedos, disipa la oscuridad y restaura la paz y esperanza. La naturaleza erótica de Jesucristo revela el deseo de Jesús de estar cerca de la comunidad. El poder salvífico de Jesús se traduce en un corazón amoroso y palpitante, manos tiernas y un aroma intoxicante. La naturaleza erótica de Jesús invita al creyente a una relación íntima más profunda y seduce al no-creyente a un tierno encuentro. En otras palabras, la naturaleza erótica de Jesús crea discipulado y evangeliza al mundo.

Estos himnos y *coritos* revelan la naturaleza erótica de la comunidad cristiana. Estos artistas populares cristianos desean, quieren y esperan intimidad con Cristo. La respuesta de nuestras comunidades protestantes caribeñas, latinoamericanas y latinas es un eroticismo carismático que busca intimidad con Jesús. Es en este deseo de intimidad, expresada en funciones corporales, fuertes sentimientos y una conexión bíblica, que la comunidad descubre la encarnada intensidad del corazón de Cristo.

Nótese cómo estos himnos y *coritos* cuestionan relaciones rígidas con Jesucristo basadas en género. *Qué Lindo es mi Cristo* y *Vivir Prendado* son dos ejemplos únicos de artistas protestantes masculinos relacionándose con Jesucristo con música e imágenes de una típica serenata a *La Morenita* -la Virgen de Guadalupe; los protestantes mexicanos y mexicano-americanos dan serenata a Jesucristo, nombrando su relación con Jesucristo como una de búsqueda de la belleza y el amor de la caricia de Cristo.

En una coyuntura donde hay un intenso debate sobre la sexualidad humana, estos himnos proveen una oportunidad para un diálogo sobre la corporalidad como elemento de espiritualidad, y el amor erótico. Esta oportunidad, ofrecida en el contexto del arte musical evangélico latinoamericano y latino, no se puede pasar por alto. Líderes en nuestras comunidades cristianas necesitan crear y estructurar espacios para un diálogo serio e informativo sobre la espiritualidad, la sexualidad, y la experiencia de lo erótico—tanto en su dimensión hetero-erótica como en la homo-erótica.

Finalmente, estos himnos y *coritos* nos recuerdan la sabiduría y la creatividad que se encuentra en la experiencia popular de Jesucristo. Estos recursos musicales son oportunidades educativas y de alabanza que lidian con preguntas y preocupaciones de nuestra comunidad con respecto al sexo, las relaciones y la necesidad de una fe que integre nuestra experiencia de la vida cotidiana. Estos recursos se convierten en una invitación a nuestras comunidades a recordar que todo es sagrado!

Himnos por Abigail Ortega<sup>25</sup>

*Acaríciame*

Acaríciame, porque a veces me siento que ando sola.  
Acaríciame, porque siento que me ahogan las olas.  
Acaríciame, cuando veas que ya no puedo más,  
Y dime que Tu me ayudarás... Y me amas. .  
Yo no sé qué me pasa, Señor; Yo me siento con mucho dolor,  
Me ha llegado una situación, que me da mucha desilusión.  
Yo quisiera dejar de sufrir, yo quisiera reír y reír,  
que mi vida fuera muy feliz,  
Yo quiero estar junto a Ti.

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<sup>25</sup> Abigail Ortega es miembro de la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) El Aposento Alto en Lake City, Georgia. De trasfondo México-americano, Ortega representa la voz Latina/o en muchas congregaciones de corte carismático. Su estilo musical es una clara apropiación de las tendencias populares actuales y la cristianización de estos estilos por esta generación de jóvenes cristianos. En uno de sus himnos el término "Mija," el cual tiene un contenido de intimidad y profundo cariño—un diminutivo de la palabra hija.



## *Mi Testimonio*

Desde niña yo he llorado, desde chica yo había sufrido,  
Y yo no entendía porqué, era así mi vida.  
Tan pequeña y yo sin padre, y con una joven madre,  
Era un mundo diferente, con un padre no de sangre.  
Muchas cosas malas pasaron; cosas malas que me hicieron;  
Yo era inocente y con una sana mente; destruyeron mi confianza, mi niñez,  
Y mi esperanza,

Yo no encontraba salida, muchos pleitos y amenazas.  
Todo mi mundo no tenía color, no sentía el frío tampoco el calor,  
Sentía miedo también depresión, a Dios gritaba en mi oración,  
que me sacara de este infierno.

*(Coro)* Dime por qué, por qué siento mucho dolor, dime por qué, por qué mi vida  
no tiene color; Dime por qué, por qué no siento Tu calor; mi corazón se está  
muriendo por falta de amor.

Pasaron años y todo cambió, en vez de bueno se puso peor;  
Mi hermano el mayor irse de la casa decidió, porque su corazón no aguantó,  
Tanta tragedia, tanto dolor, la única salida la encontró en la pandillas,  
El era mi ejemplo yo también hice lo mismo, estábamos perdidos tratando de  
encontrar amor,

Haciendo cosas para robar la atención.  
Pero mi hermano siguió más profundo, él se fue como para otro mundo,  
El ya no era el mismo, no se parecía mi hermano, ahora me sentía sola,  
Sentía que me ahogaban las olas, yo lloraba cada noche, todos los días a cada hora.

*(Coro)*  
Mi corazón endureció, día a día guardaba rencor, Yo ya no podía, hasta quise  
quitarme la vida, teniendo tantos problemas, y ahora mi hermano encarcelado; y a  
mi madre sufriendo, llorando y orando.

Yo caí, desmayé, yo sufrí y lloré, Pero algo paso, alguien me abrazó; alguien me  
acarició, me dijo ¡yo te amo!

Deja de llorar, seca tus lágrimas, yo nunca te abandoné, ni siquiera te dejé, *Mija*  
siempre te cuide, yo siempre te he sido fiel. ¡Levántate! El sanó mi corazón, vida  
nueva él me dio, El murió por mí en la cruz, por completo se entregó. Pase, pase lo  
que pase, Venga, venga lo que venga, sólo en Cristo confío. Y no hay nada que me  
detenga.

## Summary

Using popular hymns and coritos from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino/a Christian communities, this essay explores the image of the erotic Jesus from a Protestant and Pentecostal perspective. These artistic musical expressions of the grassroots provide an insight into a theology of the body that challenges the assumptions of a body-spirit divide. They also offer a ministerial opportunity for engaging in dialogue regarding spirituality, sexuality, and the erotic.

